

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O R 021037Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3203
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 0898

EXDIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, US
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: REVIEW OF SITUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SUMMARY: FIGHTING CONTINUES IN SOUTH LEBANON AS MARONITE FORCES, SUPPORTED BY ISRAELIS AND LEBANESE GENERAL STAFF, CONTINUE EFFORTS TO CREATE CORDON SANITAIRE AGAINST STIFFENING RESISTANCE FROM REJECTIONIST-LEFTIST COALITION. FATAH ROLE REMAINS EQUIVOCAL. GOL DOING GOOD DEAL OF TALKING ABOUT SITUATION BUT NOT TAKING ANY ACTION. STRUGGLE HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STABILITY OF COUNTRY AND POSSIBLY MID-EAST IN GENERAL. I RECOMMEND WE SOUND OUT ISRAELI INTENTIONS, GET THEM TO STOP FIRING INTO LEBANON AND URGE THEM TO PERMIT STATIONING OF ARAB SECURITY FORCE, INCLUDING SYRIANS, AT NABATIYAH AND TYRE. FAILING THAT, I RECOMMEND WE SUPPORT LEBANESE REQUEST FOR UN DETERRENT FORCE, IF ONE IS MADE. END SUMMARY.

2. SOUTH LEBANON CONTINUES BE PRINCIPAL PUBLIC
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PREOCCUPATION OF GOL. FONMIN BOUTROS APPEARED BEFORE PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MAR 1 AND SAID SITUATION THERE REFLECTED ALL THE INTERNAL, ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL CONTRADICTIONS WHICH MEET IN LEBANON, THAT ISRAEL'S AGGRESSIVE SENTIMENTS HAD PROVOKED A REACTION WHICH HAD SET OFF A CRISIS WHICH LEBANON HAD ACTED TO DEFUSE, AND THAT HE REGRETTE TO SAY

REGION NOT UNDER CONTROL OF GOL. THIS HAD PUSHED LATTER TO MULTIPLY ITS DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS AND CONSULTATIONS WITH LEBANESE GROUPS IN SEARCH OF A SOLUTION. SITUATION WAS VERY DELICATE, WHICH RULED OUT IMPROVISED OR PROVISIONAL SOLUTIONS.

3. FONMIN'S REMARKS CONTAINED VERY LITTLE SUBSTANCE AND SAME COULD BE SAID FOR FOLLOW-UP BLAH-BLAH REMARKS ON TV BY SPEAKER OF HOUSE, KAMAL AL-ASSAD, PRESIDENT OF COMMITTEE, AMIN AL-HAFEZ AND OTHERS. THERE CONTINUES TO BE A GREAT WRINGING OF HANDS, A CALLING OUT FOR HELP, AND VERY LITTLE ACTION. THERE ARE DEEP AND CONFLICTING CURRENTS HERE.

4. SITUATION AND LINEUP IN THE SOUTH:

A PREDOMINANTLY MARONITE LEBANESE FORCES NOW HAVE ABOUT 1500 MEN. THEY ARE SUPPORTED, AND PERHAPS DIRECTED, BY ISRAELIS, WHO HAVE FIRE SUPPORT COORDINATORS WITH THEM AND ARE GIVING ARTILLERY SUPPORT FROM FIRING LINES WITHIN ISRAEL. THEY HAVE APPARENTLY USED 175 MM GUNS FOR THIS PURPOSE IN RECENT DAYS. REINFORCEMENTS FOR MARONITES ARE FUNNELED IN THROUGH ACRE, AND LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER, GEN. HANNA SAID, WHO SITS AT YARZE, REPORTEDLY CALLED FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR THIS PURPOSE ONLY LAST WEEK AND WAS VERY GRATIFIED WITH POSITIVE RESPONSE, SENDING SOME 350 MEN IN OVER WEEKEND, FEB 26/27. SAID AND MARONITES OF SOUTH RECEIVING MORAL, MATERIEL AND MANPOWER SUPPORT FROM

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PHALANGE AND CHAMOUNIST FOLLOWERS.

B. AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS ARE ALLIED THE REJECTIONIST FRONT FEDAYEEN AND VARIOUS LEFTIST GROUPS, INCLUDING ELEMENTS OF THE LAA. FATAH, HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT ON THE SIDELINES AND HAS NOT COMMITTED ITSELF TO THE FIGHTING. IT HAS BEEN GIVING THE OTHER PALESTINIANS MORAL AND MATERIEL SUPPORT, AND HAS DONE SOME ARTILLERY FIRING, HOWEVER. THE REJECTIONISTS AND LEFTISTS HAVE SUFFERED FROM A LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION, BUT REPORTEDLY HAVE FINALLY FOUND A LEADER IN THE PERSON OF ONE HAJJ ISMAIL, NOT OTHERWISE IDENTIFIED.

C. ALTHOUGH EVERY LEBANESE I HAVE TALKED TO TO DATE PUTS THE BLAME ON THE PALESTINIANS, IT IS THE MARONITES, PUSHED BY THE ISRAELIS, WHO HAVE BEEN ON THE OFFENSIVE. THEIR IMMEDIATE GOAL, AS REPORTED EARLIER, HAS APPARENTLY BEEN THE CREATION OF A CORDON SANITAIRE ALONG THE BORDER FROM HASBAYA TO RAS NAQURA. CHAMOUNISTS WE

HAVE TALKED TO, HOWEVER, INDICATE THAT THEY HAVE A LARGER GOAL WHICH IS THE EXPULSION OF THE PALESTINIANS FROM ALL THE AREA SOUTH OF THE LITANI.

D. THE CHRISTIAN CAMPAIGN HAS GONE FAIRLY WELL, ALTHOUGH NOT NOTABLE FOR ANY SMASHING VICTORIES. THE MARONITES ALLEGEDLY ARE MOVING CAUTIOUSLY AND ARE VERY CHARY ABOUT LOSING MEN. THEY REPORTEDLY HAVE JUST HAD THEIR FIRST SERIOUS DEFEAT, HOWEVER, WHEN A SMALL FORCE THEY SENT IN TO SEIZE BINT JBAYL, WHICH WAS THOUGHT TO BE DESERTED, WAS PUSHED BACK WITH HEAVY LOSSES BY NEWLY-REINFORCED PALESTINIANS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF HAJJ ISMAIL MENTIONED ABOVE.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O R 021037Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3204
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BEIRUT 0898

EXDIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E. CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE ARE THE HAPLESS NON-CHRISTIAN NON-PALESTINIAN RESIDENTS OF THE AREA -- THE LARGELY SHIA MUSLIMS, WHO AS ONE OF THE POORER AND LESS COMBATANT POPULATIONS OF LEBANON, HAVE REALLY WANTED NONE OF THE CHRISTIANS OR THE FEDAYEEN. MANY HAVE FLED THE AREA SEEKING REFUGE IN BEIRUT OR ELSEWHERE, AND THE TOWN OF NABATIYAH AND MANY OTHERS ARE REPORTED TO BE PRACTICALLY DESERTED. MEANWHILE THE ISRAELIS, CHRISTIANS AND PALESTINIANS ALL PUMP SHELLS INTO POPULATION CENTERS WITHOUT APPARENT REGARD FOR CIVILIAN CASUALTIES OR PROPERTY DAMAGE. WE HAVE NO

IDEA HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED OR WOUNDED, BUT SUSPECT THE FIGURES ARE NOT HIGH. THE SHIA REACTION REFLECTS THEIR LACK OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP RATHER THAN THE ACTUAL CASUALTIES THEY ARE SUSTAINING. SOME OF THEM HAVE JOINED THE CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE FEDAYEEN, BUT THE MAJORITY JUST WANT TO GET OUT OF THE WAY.

F. ONE OF THE MORE ABLE DEPUTIES OF THE SOUTH,
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ABDUL LATIF ZEIN, CAME TO SEEME MAR 1 AND SAID THE SHIA WERE CONVINCED THERE WAS A TACIT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SYRIAN/ISRAELIS/PHALANGE AND FATAH TO LET THE LEBANESE FORCES ELIMINATE THE REJECTIONISTS. IF THAT WAS TRUE, SO BE IT, BUT LET THEM GET ON WITH THE JOB AND TELL THE ISRAELIS TO STOP SHELLING NABATIYAH (HIS TOWN).

5. SOLUTIONS.

A. I HAVE IMPRESSION FROM MY CONVERSATIONS WITH FOUAD BOUTROS, AND GOL'S CONTINUED TOLERATION OF MUTINOUS ACTIVITIES OF ARMY GENERAL STAFF AT YARZE, WHICH IS SUPPORTING MARONITE FORCES IN SOUTH, THAT GOL HAS SECIDED THERE NOTHING IT CAN DO, GIVEN ISRAELI VETO ON USE OF ARAB SECURITY FORCES, AND THAT IT WOULD BE JUST AS HAPPY TO SEE MARONITE FORCES TRIUMPH. INDEED, LIKE ABDUL LATIF ZEIN, THEY HOPE THEY WILL GET ON WITH IT AND GET IT OVER WITH. IN BOUTROS' WORDS, THEIR ATTITUDE IS GOING TO BE ONE OF WAIT AND SEE. THEY HAVE INDEED TAKEN RAY HARE'S ADVICE.

B. IN MEANTIME, GOL IS RINGING ALL THE CHANGES ON DIPLOMATIC BELLS TO GIVE AN IMPRESSION THAT IT IS DOING SOMETHING. IN CONVERSATION ON FEB 28, BOUTROS ASKED ME TO EXPLORE ATTITUDES OF USG ON POSSIBILITY OF A UN PRESENCE, BUT HE MADE IT CLEAR HE WAS NOT REQUESTING ONE. HE ALSO TOLD ME THAT IDEA OF SENDING IN SANITIZED ARAB SECURITY FORCES, I.E., WITHOUT SYRIANS, WHICH WE HAD DISCUSSED INFORMALLY WEEK BEFORE, WAS A NON-STARTER BECAUSE SYRIANS WERE ONLY EFFECTIVE TROOPS IN ADF.

C. SEEMS CLEAR TO US THERE ONLY ONE PRACTICABLE STEP WHICH CAN BE TAKEN NOW TO STOP THE FIGHTING, AND
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THAT IS TO LET SYRIAN ASF FORCES OCCUPY NABATIYAH AND TYRE, WITH EXPLICIT GUARANTEES TO THE ISRAELIS THAT THEY WILL NOT GO FARTHER, THAT THIS WILL NOT CONSTITUTE A PRECEDENT, AND THAT THEY WILL RETIRE AS SOON AS ORDER RESTORED. IT COULD BE DONE ON ONE-TIME, EXCEPTIONAL BASIS. I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT ISRAELI WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT SUCH A STEP, BUT POINT OUT THAT IF WE ARE NOT WILLING TO PRESS THIS ISSUE WITH THEM THERE IS LITTLE PURPOSE IN OUR TRYING TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT PROBLEM, EXCEPT POSSIBLY SENDING IN UN FORCE. PROBLEM IS THAT BY TIME FORCE READY, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS. FURTHERMORE, IT HARD TO VISUALIZE A UN SEPARATING COMBATANTS IN WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY A FAMILY DISPUTE.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.

A. WHILE CREATION OF CORDON SANITAIRE FROM HASBAYA TO NAQURA IS ATTRACTIVE PROPOSITION IN MANY RESPECTS, RESULTING SITUATION IN SOUTH IS DANGEROUS AND DISTURBING. NEEDLESS LOSS OF LIFE AND DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY, ACCUMULATION OF HUMAN MISERY AND RISK THAT FIGHTING THERE WILL SET OFF LARGER COMBATT ARE ALL REAL. IN PARTICULAR, IF PALESTINIANS SETTLE DOWN AND START FIGHTING SERIOUSLY, CONTEST WILL BE VERY BLOODY AND WILL HAVE CONSEQUENCES ELSEWHERE IN FORM OF ACTS OF DESPERATION AND TERROR AND POSSIBLE BREAKDOWN OF SAUDI-SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN ENTENTE WORKED OUT AT CAIRO AND RIYADH SUMMITS IN OCTOBER 1976. IF CHRISTIANS WIN CONTEST, AND PARTICULARLY IF THEY WIN LARGER CONTEST THEY ALLEGEDLY THINKING OF, I.E., PURGING AREA UP TO LITANI, THIS MAY PLEASE ISRAELIS BUT IT WILL POSE SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT FUTURE UNITY OF LEBANON. MARONITE PRETENSIONS AT THAT POINT LIKELY TO BECOME UNBEARABLE.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O R 021037Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3205

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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EXDIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

B. HAVING BEEN DENIED THE OPTION OF SENDING IN ARAB SECURITY FORCE, GOL HAS APPARENTLY BEEN WILLING TO LET FIGHTING TAKE ITS COURSE. AS I WRITE THIS, HOWEVER, FONMIN BOUTROS HAS JUST CALLED BEFORE LEAVING FOR ARAB FONMINS MEETING AT CAIRO AND ASKED TO KNOW WHETHER WE HAVE RECEIVED RESPONSE FROM WASHINGTON TO HIS QUERY ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE ON USE OF A UN FORCE IN AREA. SUSPECT FROM WHAT HE SAID THAT CHRISTIAN DEFEAT AT BINT JBAYL AND INCREASED CONCERN ABOUT DESTABILIZING IMPACT OF FIGHTING ON REST OF LEBANON MAY PUSH GOL TO ASK FOR UN FORCE, IF ONLY TO SHOW THAT IT IS DOING SOMETHING.

C. SUGGEST WE SHOULD DO FOLLOWING:

(1) EXPLORE ISRAELI INTENTIONS REGARDING THEIR SUPPORT OF CHRISTIAN MILITARY ACTIVITIES MORE THOROUGHLY THAN WE HAVE TO DATE.

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(2) ASK ISRAELIS TO DISCONTINUE FIRING ARTILLERY INTO LEBANON.

(3) URGE ISRAELIS TO ACCEPT ARAB SECURITY FORCE, I.E., SYRIANS, IN TOWNS OF NABATIYAH AND TYRE, WITH EXPLICIT GUARANTEES THEY WILL GO NO FURTHER AND THAT THEY WILL BE WITHDRAWN AS SOON AS SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. WHILE, AS NOTED ABOVE, I HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT ISRAELI READINESS TO ACCEPT THIS PROPOSITION, BELIEVE THERE IS IN FACT CONSIDERABLE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN THEIR OBJECTIVES AND SYRIANS IN THAT AREA. SYRIAN APPARENTLY AS DEDICATED AS ISRAELIS TO ELIMINATION OF FEDAYEEN PRESENCE.

(4) FAILING (3), THAT WE SUPPORT LEBANESE REQUEST FOR UN INTERVENTION FORCE IF ONE IS MADE.
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Message Attributes

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Sent Date: 02-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BEIRUT00898
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
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Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
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Retention: 0
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2944905
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOUTH LEBANON: REVIEW OF SITUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, LE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/315488ac-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009